

The University of Queensland

Animal Ethics Committee

Terms of Reference

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1. Introduction

As a registered user of animals for scientific purposes, The University of Queensland (UQ or the University) complies with the requirements of the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001* (Qld) and the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (8th edition, 2013; hereafter *the Code*). The University also conforms to all other extant State and Federal legislation governing the use of animals.

In accord with the requirements of *the Code*, the University has established Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) to apply the principles that govern the ethical conduct of the use of animals for scientific purposes at UQ. The University's five AECs are:

- Anatomical Biosciences (ABS)
- Production and Companion Animals (PCA)
- Molecular Biosciences (MBS)
- Native and Exotic Wildlife and Marine Animals (NEWMA)
- Health Sciences (HS)

The University's five AECs are primarily responsible for the review of protocols and inspection of facilities within their area of expertise, or at an external site (e.g., wildlife), for staff and students wishing to use animals for scientific purposes. Any UQ AEC may also consider proposals from external applicants wishing to conduct an activity at a University or external site and any exceptional proposal or issue referred to it.

This document describes the Terms of Reference for the University's AECs, as per section 2.2.18 of *the Code*. Bracketed numerical references in this document (square brackets) are references to *the Code*.

The University's AECs report through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) to the University Senate on matters affecting research and teaching involving animals at UQ.

Animal Ethics Management Committee

The University has established an Animal Ethics Management Committee to provide advice on policy and practices related to animal care and use, and to ensure consistency of processes, determinations and compliance. The committee membership includes the Chairperson from each of UQ AECs, but it is not and does not act as a duly constituted AEC under the provisions of *the Code*. The committee reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) or delegate.

2. Responsibilities

The primary responsibility of an AEC is to ensure, on behalf of the institution for which it acts, that all activities relating to the care and use of animals are conducted in compliance with *the Code* [2.3.1].

Under *the Code* section 2.3.2, the University's AECs have the responsibility to:

- 2.1 Review applications for projects based on their individual merit and approve only those projects and proposed amendments to projects that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements and governing principles of *the Code*. Judgement as to whether a proposed

use of animals is ethically acceptable must be based on information that demonstrates the principles of *the Code* and must balance whether the potential effects on the wellbeing of the animals involved is justified by the potential benefits. The AEC may decide that:

- An application to commence a project or activity is approved or not approved;
 - An application to amend an approved project or activity, is approved or not approved;
 - Approval is granted with or without conditions or deferred subject to modification;
 - An approval is suspended or revoked.
- 2.2 Provide competent, fair, consistent and timely review of applications and reports related to the care and use of animals [2.3.3].
- 2.3 Review applications for activities associated with the care and management of animals in facilities, including procedures applicable to breeding programs integral to the maintenance of an animal line, and approve only those activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements and governing principles of *the Code*.
- 2.4 Assess proposals involving pilot studies [2.3.14] or the reuse of animals [2.3.15] in accordance with the principles set out in *the Code*.
- 2.5 Conduct follow-up review of approved projects and activities, at least annually, and allow the continuation of approval for only those projects and activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements and governing principles of *the Code*.
- 2.6 Monitor the care and use of animals, including housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities. This may take place in conjunction with AEC meetings and/or separately scheduled monitoring inspections. Inspections must occur annually but may be more frequent if required. In addition, unannounced inspections of facilities and AEC approved projects may occur from time to time. Where any activity may cause pain or distress, the AEC may elect to conduct additional inspections to avoid or minimise harm, including pain and distress, to those animals.
- 2.7 Approve guidelines for the care and use of animals on behalf of the University.
- All proposed guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures will be reviewed by the appropriate AECs. Once approved, these guidelines will be available for all UQ researchers and external parties utilising the University's AECs.
- 2.8 Take appropriate actions regarding unexpected adverse events in accordance with Section 3 of *the Code*.
- The action taken must ensure that animal wellbeing is not compromised and the issue is addressed promptly. Actions may include, where necessary, suspension or withdrawal of approval for the project or activity.
- 2.9 Take appropriate actions regarding non-compliance which may result in suspension or withdrawal of ethics approval to ensure that animal wellbeing is not compromised, the issue is addressed promptly and activities that have the potential to adversely affect animal wellbeing cease immediately. Matters that represent a potential breach of the Code will be referred to the University via the Director, Research Ethics and Integrity, for assessment under the relevant University process.

- 2.10 Provide recommendations to the University on all University plans, policies, procedures and guidelines regarding the care and use of animals, animal housing, and strategies required to ensure that the requirements of *the Code* are maintained and that matters affecting animal wellbeing are addressed.
- 2.11 Provide advice to the University on the building or modification of animal facilities to ensure that the requirements of *the Code* are maintained and that matters affecting animal wellbeing are addressed. The AEC must conduct a final inspection of any modifications to animal facilities or new animal facilities prior to final approval of the facility for animal use.

3. Accountability

The University's AECs are responsible to the University's governing body, the UQ Senate, through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation). Communication with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) should be through the Director, Research Ethics and Integrity.

The University conducts an annual review of the operation of its AECs to ensure they are effective and consistent with *the Code* and institutional policies. The annual review process includes consideration of the annual report from each AEC (see section 8, below) and meeting with the AEC Chairpersons through the Animal Ethics Management Committee.

As required by the Code, an independent external review of the University's compliance with the Code is conducted at least every 4 years.

4. Role of Research Ethics and Integrity

The University's Research Ethics and Integrity office provides administrative support to the University's AEC's. This includes:

- acting as the first point of contact for applicants wishing to access UQ AECs;
- provision of advice and assistance to applicants regarding ethics applications, procedures, adverse events and mandatory reporting requirements;
- communicating with applicants on behalf of the AEC;
- assisting with the conduct and recording of meetings, including the preparation of agendas and minutes and scheduling meetings;
- overseeing database integrity and record keeping requirements;
- assisting the Chairperson to ensure compliance with all legal and ethical responsibilities as required by *the Code*;
- providing management reports.

Research Ethics and Integrity, in consultation with the relevant AEC Chairperson as required, is also responsible for determining eligibility of external applicants that wish to access the services of the University's AECs.

5. Membership

- 5.1 Each AEC must have a membership that will allow it to fulfil its terms of reference and meet the requirements for categories of minimum membership under *the Code* [2.2.4]:
- Category A: a person with qualifications in veterinary science that are recognised for registration as a veterinary surgeon in Australia, and with experience relevant to the institution's activities or the ability to acquire relevant knowledge.
 - Category B: a suitably qualified person with substantial and recent experience in the use of animals for scientific purposes relevant to the institution and the business of the AEC. This must include possession of a higher degree in research or equivalent experience.
 - Category C: a person with demonstrable commitment to, and established experience in, furthering the welfare of animals, who is not employed by or otherwise associated with UQ, and who is not involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. Veterinarians with specific animal welfare interest and experience may meet the requirements of this category. While not representing an animal welfare organisation, the person is, where possible, selected on the basis of active membership of, and endorsement by, such an organisation.
 - Category D: a person not employed by or otherwise associated with UQ and who has never been involved in the use of animals in scientific or teaching activities, either in their employment or beyond their undergraduate education. Category D members should be viewed by the wider community as bringing a completely independent view to the AEC, and must not fit the requirements of any other Category.
- 5.2 The AEC must comprise at least one person from each of the four Categories of membership in clause 5.1 above.
- 5.3 Category C and D members must together represent at least one-third of the AEC membership.
- 5.4 The University will usually appoint additional members to assist the AEC to function effectively, including:
- a person responsible for the routine care of animals within the University
 - a veterinary officer from within the University
- These members may be appointed in an advisory capacity only (non-voting member).
- 5.5 Each AEC must have a nominated Chairperson. This person will usually hold a senior academic position in the University. If an appointee is external to UQ the appointee shall be given a commitment by the University to provide the necessary support and authority to carry out the role [2.2.2]
- 5.6 An Acting Chairperson (from within its membership) must be appointed to cover short-term absences of the Chairperson.
- 5.7 All Committee positions will be advertised in a clear and transparent manner. For member categories external to the University (Category C & D), prospective members could also be found via word of mouth.

- 5.8 Prospective members must undergo an interview process with staff in Research Ethics and Integrity and their nomination be endorsed by the AEC Chairperson. In the case of the appointment of an AEC Chair, the interview process will usually be conducted by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and the Research Ethics and Integrity Director or their delegates, who will provide a recommendation to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).
- 5.9 Prior to appointment, applicants may be invited to first attend an AEC meeting as an "observer", after which they may accept the position.
- 5.10 Prior to appointment, AEC members will:
- Acknowledge in writing that they accept the AEC Terms of Reference;
 - Sign a Confidentiality Disclosure Agreement;
 - Confirm that they have not been involved in a disqualifying event as described under the *Act*;
 - Declare interests or associations that may lead to a conflict of interest in executing the responsibilities of an AEC member;
 - For external members, acknowledge in writing that they are required to abide by UQ policies and procedures, including PPL 1.50.01 Code of Conduct.
- 5.11 The term of membership for those appointed to an AEC shall normally be for a three year period. This period is deemed to be sufficient to permit new members to become familiar with operational procedures and the variety of research and teaching at a large University.
- 5.12 A member can be re-appointed for a second term.
- 5.13 In exceptional circumstances, and on a case-by-case basis, additional terms of membership will be considered but the member may need to serve on an AEC committee that is different to their current appointment.
- 5.14 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) or delegate may conclude a membership term at any time.
- 5.15 Members may resign from the AEC at any time by advising Research Ethics and Integrity in writing with a two-month notification period.
- 5.16 Members who fail to attend three meetings within a six-calendar month period will be deemed to have resigned their position on the Committee, unless there are mitigating circumstances that are approved by the Director Research Ethics and Integrity.
- 5.17 Research Ethics and Integrity will monitor the AEC membership needs in accordance with *the Code*.

6. Operations

- 6.1 Research Ethics and Integrity will establish a meeting schedule for the calendar year in advance. Each AEC will meet once per month (at a minimum), typically excluding January.
- 6.2 An Extraordinary meeting may be called to respond to urgent matters, including emergency situations, emergency welfare interventions and applications addressing a crisis situation

related to human, animal or environmental safety.

- 6.3 Each meeting must have a quorum. A quorum is reached when one member of each category is present at all times during the meeting. If the meeting has more than four members, categories C and D must represent no less than one third of the members.
- 6.4 Each committee member is responsible for deciding whether, in their own judgement, an application or other matter under consideration by the AEC is ethically acceptable and meets the requirements of *the Code* [2.2.14].
- 6.5 Decisions by the AEC with regard to approval, modification or rejection of a proposal, or withdrawal of approval for a project, should be made on the basis of consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached after reasonable effort to resolve differences, the AEC should explore with the applicant(s) ways of modifying the project that may lead to consensus at the next meeting of the AEC. If consensus is not reached at that time, the AEC may proceed to a majority decision after members who were present throughout the discussions have been allowed a period of further discussion.
- 6.6 The AEC may invite an applicant to meet with the committee and/or Chairperson to assist in resolving issues.
- 6.7 The AEC may invite people with specific expertise to provide advice as required. Experts must sign a Confidentiality Agreement before being provided with details of the project to comment upon.
- 6.8 Members of the AEC are required to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest at the commencement of the meeting. Should a member identify a conflict of interest at any time during the meeting, this must be declared at that time.
- 6.9 Members of the AEC whose objectivity may be influenced by an interest (including consideration of an application submitted by that member or by a collaborator) are required to leave the meeting during the consideration of the application.
- 6.10 Committee members must maintain confidentiality regarding the content of applications and the deliberations of the AEC, in accordance with their confidentiality agreement with the University.

7. Appointment and Operation of AEC Executives

- 7.1 An Executive may be established to streamline the animal ethics review process. The Executive must include the Chairperson and at least one Category C or D member [2.2.23]. The AEC may delegate functions to the Executive as follows:
 - approve minor modifications to approved projects where the proposed change is not likely to cause harm, pain or distress to the animals.
 - must not approve new proposals.
- 7.2 Decisions and recommendations of the Executive must be ratified at the next quorate meeting of the AEC.

8. Reporting

- 8.1 The AEC must comply with the reporting requirements of the University, *the Code* [2.3.28] and all other relevant state, territory and international legislation and regulations.
- 8.2 The AEC must submit a written report on its activities at least annually to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) for submission to the Senate. The report should include information on [2.3.29]:
 - Numbers and types of projects assessed and approved or rejected;
 - The physical facilities for the care and use of animals by the institution;
 - Activities that have supported the educational needs of AEC members, and of personnel involved in the care and use of animals;
 - Administrative or other difficulties being experienced; and
 - Any matters that may affect the institution's ability to maintain compliance with *the Code* and if necessary the provision of suitable recommendations.
- 8.3 The AEC reports annually to the Biosecurity Queensland, on behalf of all investigators. The AEC also reports to other State and Territory Governments and regulatory bodies as required.

9. Responsibilities of the Chairperson

The chairperson is responsible for impartially guiding the operation of the AEC, resolving conflicts of interest related to the business of the AEC, and representing the AEC in any negotiations with the institution's management [2.2.13]. The Chair must:

- 9.1 Ensure that the AEC operates in accordance with the principles and requirements of *the Code*, the relevant policies of the University and its documented operating procedures and terms of reference.
- 9.2 Review the meeting minutes promptly to ensure that the outcomes are conveyed to the researchers in a timely fashion [2.2.27].
- 9.3 Advise Research Ethics and Integrity of the adequacy of administrative support and the levels of resources recommended by the AEC, including orientation and training of members [2.2.19].
- 9.4 Refer matters to the University via the Director, Research Ethics and Integrity, or their delegate, when required [2.3.25].

10. Revision

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed as necessary in response to changes in legislation, the Code and/or UQ policy.